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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S. BEEF IMPORTS TO TAIWAN

¶1. Summary: On October 28, the Taiwan government's decision to open its market to U.S. beef continued to receive extensive coverage in Taiwan's print media. Major Chinese-language and English-language dailies reported that dozens of trade organizations and hundreds of stores and restaurants in Taipei and other cities have signed up for an alliance launched by Taipei City Mayor Hau Lung-bin to reject the sale of U.S. beef offal, ground beef and spinal cords. All these major papers also reported on the remarks by AIT Director William Stanton Tuesday defending the safety of U.S. beef. The KMT-leaning "China Times" ran a banner headline on page four regarding the results of its latest opinion survey, reading "Beef Offal Storm: 72 Percent [of Those Polled] Criticize the United States as Tyrannical; Ma's Approval Rating Drops Suddenly by 14 Percent."

¶2. All the major dailies carried editorials and op-ed pieces on U.S. beef imports. Two separate columns in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" severely criticized the Ma administration's "horrible" decision-making model and "absurd" argument in allowing the import of U.S. beef and offal. A column in the pro-unification "United Daily News" said the United States will surely "lose a lot by just trying to gain a little" on the beef issue. A "United Daily News" editorial discussed U.S. beef imports and criticized the Ma administration's handling of the issue. An op-ed in the KMT-leaning, China-focused "Want Daily" expressed concern about the Taiwan government's "spineless" position in the face of U.S. pressure. End summary.

A) "Negotiations That Cost One to Lose One's Pants"

Columnist Antonio Chiang wrote in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 520,000] (10/28):

"... The [Taiwan] Presidential Office, in an attempt to mislead the public and solicit sympathy, put out words to imply that [the decision on U.S.] beef imports is related to [Taiwan's joining] the visa-waiver program and the signing of a Taiwan-U.S. Trade and Investment [Framework] Agreement. In reality, however, these are two separate issues. There are objective criteria for getting the visa-waiver treatment, including the rates of [people] violating the relevant visa regulations and committing crimes in the United States. Taiwan has yet to meet all these criteria, so there is no way [it can be included in the visa-waiver program] no matter how much beef it imports. Talks over a Taiwan-U.S. Trade and Investment [Framework] Agreement have been going on for many years, which involves [many] complicated issues. [The attempt to] link the agreement with [U.S.] beef is nothing but an excuse for self-rationalization.

"Some people claim that Taiwan's economy must not rely too heavily on mainland China, and that by allowing the import of U.S. beef it can help to balance the triangular relationship between Taiwan, the United States and China and prevent [Taiwan] from tilting overly toward mainland China. Such arguments are akin to putting the cart before the horse and are totally nonsensical. ... The talks with the Americans over [U.S.] beef have caused Taiwan to lose its pants. Taiwan may lose more than its pants if the same bunch of people

talk with Beijing over the [signing of] the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement."

B) "A Horrible Decision-making Model"

The "Spicy Apple" column in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 520,000] (10/28):

"... It is true that the Ma administration has suffered pressure from the United States to open [its market to U.S. beef]. It is also true that Taiwan cannot live without the United States as its friend. But the question is: True, this is the [unfavorable] position that Taiwan is in; but did the Ma administration intend to tell its people that its decision-making model is to not appeal to public opinion? Perhaps the Ma administration has forgotten that public opinion is the strongest buttress when facing a predicament. Taiwan's legislative body may not enjoy a very good image, but when it comes to [Taiwan's] policy towards U.S. beef, a legislative body that is well-known for its fist-fighting and causing trouble may be the best weapon that [Taiwan] can wield. Even the mayor of [Taiwan's] capital city has taken the lead to express opposition [to the U.S. beef imports], with the restaurant owners following suit -- this is public opinion.

"The United States is a democracy, and it has to take Taiwan's public opinion seriously when negotiating [with the island]. [We] can hardly imagine that the Ma administration, to everyone's surprise, has cast the handy and effective tool of public opinion aside and just quietly come to a decision to open [Taiwan's market] to U.S. beef. ..."

C) "U.S. Beef vs. Taiwan People"

The "Short Commentary" column in the pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 40,000] (10/28):

"... The United States is a typical Western cowboy. The European Union and South Korea have all opened their markets to U.S. bone-in beef under U.S. pressure. It goes without saying that Taiwan cannot be allowed to stand alone and act differently. Our government, in consideration of Taiwan's overall national interests, actually has its difficulties and thus has no alternative but to open its market [to U.S. beef]. Export-oriented Taiwan may lose its advantage if the United States decides to play tough by imposing trade sanctions [against the island]. Nonetheless, the United States has the power to force the Taiwan government to yield, but it cannot force the Taiwan people to open their mouths. As long as we refuse to eat [U.S. beef], there is nothing the Americans can do. ...

"U.S. beef [imports] this time is akin to repeating the mistake of the [U.S.] turkey [years ago], and it has aroused the Taiwan people's aversion even before it has been imported. What is even worse is the shadow of [contracting] mad cow disease. How can such negative products enjoy high sales in the market? ... Frankly speaking, for the U.S. beef issue, the United States will surely lose a lot by trying to gain a little. U.S. beef steaks are usually expensive and delicious, and are very popular [in Taiwan]. But once it is contaminated by the beef offal, perhaps few would dare to eat U.S. steaks. Are these smart trade talks?"

D) "U.S. Beef Issue: Hau Lung-bin and McDonalds"

The pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 40,000] editorialized (10/28):

"Two developments in the U.S. beef issue are quite enlightening: one is the 'self-management alliance' launched by [Taipei Mayor] Hau Lung-bin, and the other is businesses like McDonalds starting to declare that they will not use U.S. beef. Hau has grasped the essence of 'politics of the common people,' while McDonalds is astute about the secrets of 'economics for the common people.' By contrast, the practices of the Ma administration were akin to turning itself into the public enemy of the 'common people politics' and 'common people economics.' Who would have thought [such a development would happen]? ..."

E) "Deep Concerns over the Import of U.S. Beef"

Wu Rong-yuan, convener of the Preparatory Committee for the Forum on Cross-Strait Peaceful Development, opined in the KMT-leaning, China-focused "Want Daily" [circulation: 10,000] (10/28):

"... Sources said that the U.S. side has used the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) and the so-called arms sales for 'balanced defense' as its bargaining chips to coerce and lure Taiwan to yield [in the beef talks]. These are the means that the United States has habitually used, so they are not at all surprising. The question lies after all in the [Taiwan] government's criteria in making its policy and its policy direction. Taiwan's [decision to] fully open itself to U.S. beef simply reflected the island's long-standing reliance on the United States. Given the [Taiwan] government's spineless position where it forfeits its own principles in the face of the United States, one cannot help but wonder when it comes to the development of cross-Strait relations, whether the progress in peaceful development across the Strait, made with great difficulties via the '1992 consensus,' will be jeopardized by the United States' strategic interference of 'using Taiwan to restrain China?' ..."

STANTON